

Invasive Plant Species Assessment Working Group

January 6, 2004

NRCS office

(Rev. 1/8/04)

Attending: Ellen Jacquart (TNC, INPAWS), Rick Phillabaum (INDOT), Lee Casebere (Div of Nature Preserves), Larry Nees (IN Seed Commissioner's office), Mike Cline (INLA and ILA), Dave Gorden (ASLA), Jim Gerbracht (Div. of SP and Res), Phil O'Connor (Div. of Forestry), Dallas Foster (INLA), David Benson (Marian College), Bob Waltz (DNR, Div. of Entomology & Plant Pathology)

- 1. Welcome, introductions and agenda approval.** Two new people joined us at this meeting; Dallas Foster will be the president of INLA for two years starting in 2005, and David Benson is a professor at Marian College working on invasive management and restoration projects on campus. Agenda was approved.
- 2. Oriental bittersweet assessment.** Lee updated the committee on the assessment of Oriental bittersweet and resulting recommendations. Participating in the assessment were Lee, Mike Cline, David Gorden, Cliff Chapman (Div. of Nature Preserves) and Ellen Jacquart. The species was found to have very high ecological impact, high potential for expansion, high difficulty of management and low economic value. Recommendations included that nurseries not sell Oriental bittersweet live plants or dried stems with berries, and that craft stores/decorators/naturalists not use Oriental bittersweet for wreaths and other dried flower arrangements. American bittersweet is recommended as an alternative.

Dallas asked who fills out the survey reports, and we discussed the database of Invasive Reporters (ecologists, naturalists, and others who have demonstrated ability to identify and quantify invasive plant species). Jim Gerbracht asked how this information gets to the right people; that is, does the report of bittersweet at Clifty

Falls go to State Parks so they know about it? Lee responded that Div. of Nature Preserves regional ecologists work with state park personnel regarding invasives, and Cliff Chapman is working with Clifty Falls on the population there. Jim also noted that it is important for reports and recommendations from this group reach higher levels of the organization so that it can help to form division priorities and demonstrate where funds are needed for control.

Bob asked for discussion on whether it would be appropriate to 'ban' this species from commercial activity. The general feeling was that this is a very minor species in the trade, and is already established throughout the landscape. Much of the trade in dried stems is likely from established populations on forest edges, etc. rather than plantings made for that purpose. However, Dallas noted there is an increase in propagation for cuttings of various species, including bittersweet. In fact, Jed Young of Purdue Extension is giving a talk on this at this week's INLA annual meeting. Despite this, there was no consensus that banning the species would be more effective than educating the general public and others.

Regarding commercial value of the species, Dave Benson asked why there wasn't a question in the assessment regarding the number of retail outlets selling plants. We discussed that,

while this would be an excellent measure for economic value, there is no way to quantify how many out of the 4,000 dealers in Indiana carry a particular species. We are limiting the assessment to objective, quantifiable numbers wherever possible and didn't want to introduce guesswork into our answers. We are interested in getting more/better measures to quantify economic value, and suggestions are welcomed.

The committee adopted the recommendations of the assessment subcommittee.

3. **Next species.** Ellen passed around a summary of results for the seven species assessed so far, and recommended that the next species be Japanese honeysuckle. This species will pose a challenge given the number of cultivars on the market and limited information on the relative invasiveness of each. There was agreement on this, and Ellen will send around a note asking for subcommittee members and setting an assessment date.
4. **Overview of weed laws.** Bob gave a summary of definitions and jurisdictions of exotic weeds, noxious weeds, and detrimental plants. Larry continued the discussion with a three page handout that summarized Indiana's laws regarding weeds. Briefly, Division of Entomology and Plant Pathology has broad jurisdiction over pests and pathogens that tends to focus on problem species recently established in the state. The State Seed Commissioner has jurisdiction over introduction of weeds through seed. The two agencies have complementary authority. The existing laws are numerous, complex, and somewhat haphazard. This makes administration a challenge. County weed control boards and township trustees also have jurisdiction over some weeds, but this authority is often not exercised.

Bob and Larry were asked whether weed laws work better in states that have a state-level weed control board, versus the optional county level control boards that Indiana has. Bob replied that, from what he's seen, the states that tend to be more organized and active are those with big range issues. Weeds have a much greater impact on forage lands than annual row crops, so range states tend to put more funding into this issue.

5. **Salt tolerant grasses.** The Division of Oil and Gas is interested in finding salt-tolerant species for remediation of brine-damaged areas. They provided Bob with a report from Kansas reviewing two species of salt-tolerant grass (*Sporobolus airoides* and *Distichilis spicata*) and have asked for comments as to whether these species might be invasive in Indiana. Bob gave copies of the report to those interested (Larry, Lee, and Ellen). He will also contact Keith Johnson of Purdue Extension and NRCS about this. Doris Scully of NRCS led a group a few years ago to review salt tolerant species for an update of their Field Office Technical Guide.
6. **Round up ready bent grass.** Rick Phillabaum reported that Monsanto has contacted INDOT to review and provide comments on their genetically engineered Roundup-ready bent grass product. It has been tested in Indiana for a number of years (under permit through Bob's office and USDA) and they hope to commercialize soon. Rick noted that a Roundup-ready grass would make ROW maintenance much easier, and allow them to control noxious weeds like Canada thistle and Johnson grass without harming the turf. However, he also had

environmental concerns – does the Roundup resistance transfer to seeds, and what if those seeds wash downstream into wetland natural areas? Is there a chance this species could displace native plants?

Ellen noted that The Nature Conservancy has concerns over this potential introduction and that they are asking the same kind of questions. In general, this is a fairly non-aggressive, weak species and so the potential of invasion seems small. Phil noted that he has seen freshly sown bent grass seed get washed downriver from the planting site and establish in riparian areas. However, it does not persist, usually get outcompeted within a year. Ellen pointed out that the burden should be on Monsanto to demonstrate that the plant will not become a problem in natural areas. Rick also reported that Monsanto is working on a Roundup-ready fescue and there was general agreement that the potential for an invasive problem may very well exist with such an introduction given the aggressiveness of some fescue species. Larry suggested Rick talk to Zack Ryder at Purdue Extension about this because with Zack's background in turf grass he may have some answers regarding this potential introduction.

Any questions or concerns on the potential release of this species should be forwarded to Rick or Ellen.

7. **Updates.** Rick Phillabaum announced that INDOT would no longer use crown vetch in specs starting in September. He is still looking for replacement ideas for 3:1 slopes and ideas should be forwarded to him.

Ellen handed out the final draft of the IPSAWG brochure. Comments should be sent to her within the next few weeks. It'll be finalized and copies brought to the next meeting. Members can hand them out to anyone wanting to know more about the group.

Phil asked if anyone had heard of Egyptian wheat. Someone came into his office asking about it recently – apparently it is a large grass planted in wet areas for quail habitat. Jim G. has heard of it, but had no information about it.

Ellen mentioned that the Midwest Invasive Plant Network is continuing to establish and grow. There are several committees formed, including one for 'Green Industry'. The group will work to increase communication and collaboration on control techniques, funding sources, early detection – rapid response programs, educational materials and so on.

Bob gave an update on the website – they are close to having a product up and running. The website will feature invasive species projects/issues in Indiana – it will include all taxa, and all science-based efforts will be included.

Next meeting – 9 am, March 2
Location will be emailed to you before the meeting